Priority One

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Priority One

by shiphitsthefan

Summary

Will Graham became the unwilling host of a xenomorph, ultimately leading to his demise. Hannibal, an android scientist working for the Verger-Pazzi Corporation, finds his dear friend's death unacceptable; additionally, the opportunity to study the newly-discovered species is too tempting to turn down.

The Company looks to profit; the crew of the *Baltimore,* to cope; the resurrected and hybridized Will, to accept his fate. As for Hannibal, his developing emotions may prove more alien than the actual one he cares for on board.

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A series of related ficlets taking place within the *Alien* universe.

Notes

When Hanni-Bunny-Lecter invited folks to write fic for her fantastic xenomorph!Will/android!Hannibal AU--which you want to go check out that art, because it is *amazing*--I knew I had to write something for it. I love the movie *Alien.* Like, a lot. (Not as much as betts, but I don't think anyone in the history of ever loves *Alien* like she does.)

I'm leaving the chapter count a question mark because I really want to continue writing ficlets and drabbles for this universe. This was actually my writing warm-up yesterday morning, so I might let it keep serving that purpose. So, long story short, if you enjoy this, then watch this space.

Endless gratitude to my betas, Llewcie and betts. I hope this does the artwork justice! <3

See the end of the work for more notes

Purrfect Organism

Following Will through the bowels of the *Baltimore* toward the engine room is more difficult than Hannibal expected. For a ship designed with more inexplicable basements than crew quarters, the Verger-Pazzi Corporation surely could have included roomier crawl spaces in their finished product. Hannibal worries for the integrity of his vinyl suit, but presses forward, regardless.

Will's claws squeak and scratch as he scuttles through the vents--it's a design flaw Hannibal intends to correct in future clones, though he's determined to "forget" how to transfer Will's consciousness and memories again. Having his favorite human mad at him for bringing him back to life again a second time sounds...distasteful. It's an experience Hannibal doesn't wish to repeat. His wardrobe would hardly survive another acid purge, never mind his synthetic skin.

Besides, Hannibal's grown immensely fond of this hybrid Will; he'd hate to risk losing him permanently, no matter how much further experimentation would satisfy his curiosity. Out of dozens of prototypes, this is the first Will that Hannibal has found adequate.

A strange thing, indeed, these emotions. Before Will, Hannibal would have set one of the nanobots out to follow him, wouldn't have risked his carefully-tailored clothes. Bedelia had admonished him, before the Company moved his research off the *Florence.* How terrible it must have been for her to be dismantled.

But he can make other, lesser clones for Verger-Pazzi, so long as Hannibal is allowed to keep following this inquisitive, beautiful creature.

The sharp end of Will's tail clanks against the metal wall of the vent as he slithers down into the engine room. By the time Hannibal lands, vinyl suit creaking as he pushes himself up from his feet, Will is nowhere it be found. Hannibal hopes he can work out the logistics of an empath chip soon. Of all of Will's traits, Hannibal regrets the loss of his voice the most.

It will be nice for Will to stop throwing bits of electronics and scrap metal at him to get his attention, but that's merely a fringe benefit to telepathic communication.

Hannibal's steps echo in the engine room. He blinks into the gloom, switching to his dark vision lenses. The red glow of his eyes reflects off the metal pipes.

"As much as I appreciate you finally leaving the lab," Hannibal begins, calling out into the cavernous room, "I would very much like to know where you are, Will."

There's a hiss from above his head, but Hannibal knows better than to look up. One acid burn scar across his nose is enough.

"Thank you."

Will scrapes his tail along a pipe in reply, and pokes his head from out of the darkness. His dark hair is a mat of curls where he refuses to let Hannibal groom him. Silver eyes glare down at him, and Will's nose is drawn up as he snarls. Splicing his DNA didn't even breed the sass out of Will.

"Are you hunting?" asks Hannibal. Another hiss, and Will breaks eye contact. His pharyngeal jaw snaps from his mouth at an angle, aimed at something unseen, before he retreats back out of sight. "An unlucky crewmate? The science team seems to like you, Beverly in particular."

There's a short chirp from the ceiling, now somewhere behind Hannibal. It's fascinating, the noises that are distinct to Will, different from other xenomorphs; Hannibal's research has shown, thus far, that XX121 are incapable of emitting anything other than a hiss or a screech.

He briefly allows himself to wonder if Will might retain some of his omega traits, if he might be capable of moaning, as well. Only time will tell, and there are more interesting aspects of Will's new biology to study for now. For instance, the retractable spines that don't so much spring from his body as they do press up against his skin, remolding and stretching it. He watches Will do it now, skin shrinking behind the blunt vestigial vertebrae as they sink into Will's back, fluid and effortless as he alights on the floor several meters in front of Hannibal.

"Gorgeous," Hannibal muses. If Will hears him, he gives no sign of having done so.

Will creeps forward on his hind feet, still crouched, moving with uncharacteristic slowness toward a group of generators. He stretches an arm out toward them, clawed hand palm down, rubbing his thumb and forefingers together. Hannibal adjusts his aural volume to better hear the quiet smacking of Will's lips--it's almost a popping noise, a release of suction.

Hannibal crouches, too. An automatic, sympathetic response, and he's unused to those, as well.

His internal clock ticks away: three minutes; five minutes and seventeen seconds; twenty-two sixtieths more; another forty beyond that. An hour passes, and Hannibal marks it, though time rarely matters to beasts like them.

A few seconds past eighty-four minutes, and an orange cat emerges from behind a clump of cables.

Applesauce.

Alana's.

Hannibal smiles, blunt teeth and dental-model pink gums. He hopes Will intends to leave a burnt offering at her door. Perhaps it would finally dissuade the ship's beta doctor from infantilizing his reluctant companion. Alana was bad enough when Will was alive.

To his surprise, Will purrs. Hannibal lets his lungs inflate unnecessarily. The study of Will's vocalizations sorts itself to the top of his research spreadsheet.

Will slinks down onto his forearms, head tilted to one side; his rumbling purr grows louder, and his tail slips across the floor, back and forth, rhythmic and feline. Applesauce cautiously creeps toward him, and Hannibal silently applauds her bravery. Captain Crawford won't even enter the same deck as the labs, let alone *approach* Will.

It's not as if Hannibal minds. Jack's constant alpha posturing and subsequent badgering of Will aboard the *Florence* is what drove the engineer to take a walk when they landed on Necronom IV, to lose his way back home, leading to the most difficult experience of Hannibal's existence.

Hannibal has tried to delete the video file of Will blasting himself in the chest upon waking in the medical bay. He's wiped the memory of Will's hand on his cheek before he pushed Hannibal through the door and sealed it, but the back-up files of Hannibal's first sensation of loving touch seem to be endless. The silent, mouthed words as Hannibal pounded his fists uselessly against the impenetrable plexiglass, and the spatter of blood and bone and brain against it, are details he simply cannot forget.

He remembers the cracks in his eyes as they leaked, milky white fluid that blurred his vision until Hannibal shut himself down, forehead pressed against the glass, fists crushed and broken, twisted and dangling from their sockets.

Though Hannibal will never forget Jack's role in Will's death--and how odd it is, how very human, to hold a grudge--without Jack's assistance, Hannibal would never have had the chance to witness Will's hybridization and, ultimately, his Becoming.

But Applesauce is only concerned with the monster before her now--not his former humanity, or how much of it he has retained, but only how long he will continue to pet her. She presses her head into Will's grey palm, answers his purr with her own, rubs her whiskers against his red-blushed fingers. Before long, Will has gathered Applesauce into his arms and sits on the floor, tail curled around his folded legs, cradling her to his chest, rubbing his own cheek against the top of her head.

Hannibal's CPU whirs faster. His fluids push and flow through his cords--Hannibal can feel them swell, unused to more than a smooth and sluggish speed. Will smiles, and Hannibal's circuits ache, which makes no sense, because he shouldn't feel *anything*.

Instead, Hannibal feels *alive,* and that alarms him, which shouldn't happen, either.

Will suddenly laughs, a tiny, breathy clicking. It had been rare when Will was human. Hannibal never realized how lyrical it was then until now, and now, it is music.

He shifts his ear up, and records the song. For his research, he tells himself, but Hannibal knows he'll end up composing a replication for the harpsicom. Maybe Will, once tamed, will let Hannibal play it for him, and he'll smile again, and laugh again. Hannibal would stretch the fingers of one hand to the wires, elongate his joints to reach every key, and pet Will as he pets Applesauce now.

Hannibal can see it so clearly. The picture paints itself behind one eye. He winks to save it, but the motion malfunctions, and the painting is gone.

No matter. Hannibal can draw it again.

For now, he begins devising a method for cloning the cat.

Purrfect Organism II

Chapter Notes

> "This fic is going to be composed of my writing session warm-up drabbles," they said as they composed 1800 words of xenomorph fluff.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's been three months since the decommissioning of the *Florence,* and Hannibal still hasn't become accustomed to humans simply barging into his laboratory. No one on board the *Florence* had particularly liked Hannibal, not even the other androids. Thus, everyone had been inordinately polite, buzzing for entry at the door or, better still, scheduling appointments.

Will had been the sole exception, a twitchy engineer with no understanding or capability of learning etiquette. He'd storm into the lab ranting and raving--had done so from day one with no introduction whatsoever. But Hannibal had never considered Will a human; he was too fascinating to belong to such a dull species.

Once Will had been elevated, he sequestered himself in the lab, though Hannibal continues to be unsure why. Crewmates had stopped making appointments altogether after that, which was perfectly fine with Hannibal. He'd expected that to be the new normal aboard the *Baltimore,* as well, especially considering Jack and Alana had been reassigned with him.

What Hannibal did not foresee was his new science team helping themselves into his private science bay. He wonders how Captain Crawford accomplished anything, having underlings constantly popping up underfoot.

Price and Zeller are tolerable, at least, though still a bit wary of both Will and Hannibal; fresh from professorships at the Academy, neither beta had ever worked with a Company android before, let alone one of Hannibal's caliber. Hannibal would preen at their awe of him if they would afford him more space. They are bright, though, and always interrupt as a pair, soon bickering between themselves and leaving Hannibal to work around them.

Company Agent Katz, however, is another matter entirely. She's bright, and eager to learn, and entirely too curious as far as Hannibal's concerned. He could do without the questions and poking around. If Will hadn't begun to warm up to his fellow omega, Hannibal would have banned Beverly from the science bay altogether.

If Doctor Bloom decides to make a habit of storming into his labs, he will find a way to bar her from the entire deck. Either that, or she'll wind up tripping and falling out of the shuttle bay. Not even Will's former friendship with Alana could save her.

Actually, Will might be persuaded to take care of the problem. Hannibal files the idea away to consider later.

“Are you even listening to me, Hannibal?”

“I hear you,” he replies. A peripheral scan finds Alana’s fingers tightening against the edges of the box in her hands. He watches the play of the thenar eminence beneath the skin of her thumb, magnifying the area of the opponens pollicis. Will seemed to be having trouble flexing his outer claw this morning; his aim had been off when he lobbed Hannibal’s favorite nanoscope at his head. “Could you flex your thumb for me?”

“What?”

“Your thumb,” repeats Hannibal. “If you would be so kind as to move it up and down. I need to make a visual recording.”

Alana scoffs. “I was asking you about my--”

“It’s for Will.” He turns his head to look at her pointedly.

Much to Hannibal’s delight, Alana wiggles her thumb. *Interesting.*

“Excellent,” Hannibal tells her, then returns to recalibrating his nanoscope.

“Now,” begins Alana, “can you please tell me what the hell you let into my quarters this morning?”

“I hardly let it in. If the creature ran inside when you opened the door, that’s hardly my fault.”

The box hits the table; there’s a hiss within it. “What is this, Dr. Lecter?”

“That,” and he sets down his work, turning off the soldering function of his precision laser monocle, “is Applesauce.”

“No, it isn’t.”

Hannibal crosses his arms over his chest. He’d observed Will do so often enough on the *Florence* when he needed to be intimidating, convincing. “I assure you, that is your cat.”

“And *I* assure *you* that it is not.”

Tapping his finger against the top of the closed box produces a satisfying scuttle from inside, and Alana takes a step back. “Well.” Hannibal hesitates; parsing bits of truth has always been difficult for him. “It is *a* cat.”

Alana continues to retreat as Hannibal begins to open the box. “It’s not that, either,” she insists, bumping up against the lip of another table.

Frowning, Hannibal scruffs the creature and pulls it out. Each of its six legs begin to flail, and it wraps one of its two tails around Hannibal’s arm, constricting like a snake. He looks it in

the general vicinity of its eye. When it opens its mouth and hisses at him, Hannibal's mouth relaxes again. The dear thing sounds like Will.

"It *could* be a cat." Hannibal scritches the replacement pet behind a furry ear. Its whiskers twitch as it attempts to meow. The vocal box must need greasing, which means the design is nowhere near ready for Will. A pity. "This is a Completely Acceptable Transcription of your supposedly-beloved Applesauce," explains Hannibal.

"Completely Acceptable Transcr--Hannibal, is that supposed to be a joke?"

Hannibal pets the C.A.T. now stretching out over his arm, grateful to have thought ahead and armor-plated its belly. Will has already delighted in showing Applesauce how to rub itself all over Hannibal's wardrobe; he hardly needs the C.A.T. following suit now. "It was supposed to be a cat. I admit to having a limited genetic pool from which to splice, but the Company has yet to provide me with feline nucleotides A request from a second physician could expedite the process."

Alana stares at him, blinking, mouth slightly open; he's not sure what about this she finds so unbelievable. "Where is Applesauce?" she asks approximately three-point-seven seconds later.

"Will found her in the engine room while you were on shore leave." Hannibal tilts his head to stretch the elasticated tendons. "Really quite careless of you."

"Jimmy and Brian were supposed to be watching her."

"This situation appears to be the result of a series of poorly made decisions, Miss Bloom."

"So, what?" Alana seems unsure of what to do with her hands. "Will abducting my cat and you attempting to clone it is *my* fault?"

Hannibal shrugs with one shoulder, a smooth several centimeters for him alone to appreciate. "It's hardly mine."

Alana closes her eyes, taking a series of deep, steady breaths. "Just give me my cat so I can leave."

"Ah." He clears his throat. Humans often aren't certain how to interpret that, Hannibal's found; it arouses a kind of anxiety. The hesitant way in which Alana follows him to the biolab is, therefore, extremely satisfying. "Will?" Hannibal gently calls out. "Are you home?"

A few deep, staccato clicks echo inside the stasis drawers.

"After you," says Hannibal, politely allowing Alana to make the first approach to the row of drawer units in the wall. If she's lucky, Will won't snap at her this time. Hannibal finds the physical equivalent just as amusing as Will's prior verbal combativeness.

"Which one is he...in?"

"Will doesn't have a preference. I wouldn't hazard a guess."

Alana bites at her bottom lip; her eyebrows meet in the middle. “Hi, Will,” she starts. Her voice is irritatingly sing-song, as if she’s speaking to a child. Predictably, Will doesn’t respond. “Do you have my cat?”

The slithering chafe of carapace against ceramic tells Hannibal that Will is circling within his self-imposed coffin. Hannibal’s zygomaticus major malfunctions.

“Is Applesauce okay?” asks Alana, but the clanking continues, and the doors of the stasis chambers rattle. “Will,” and her voice trembles as she takes a few steps closer. “Will, have you hurt her?”

Sudden, unnatural silence. C.A.T.’s tails stand up straight.

“It--it’s okay, Will, if you did. It would have been an--an accident, and everyone makes mistakes, right?”

Hannibal hears Will’s eyes roll, but knows that Alana’s auditory stereocilia aren’t so finely attuned as his.

She creeps closer still, arms within Will’s superb reach. Alana puts her palm against the first drawer, then runs her fingers along to the second, the third. “Will?”

Applesauce meows.

“Will?” Her voice is breathy as she drags her fingertips along the fourth, like she’s loathe to disrupt the air.

A second, more plaintive meow.

“W--”

The fifth drawer flies open and Will leaps out in a blur of movement. Alana shrieks and covers her face, but Will flattens himself as he passes overhead, digging the four clawed fingers of one hand into the reinforced white steel of the ceiling. His thumb taps against it uselessly--Hannibal clicks and drags his plan for a prototype flexor into the priority project file. Will makes up for his deficient thumb by embedding the tip of his tail into the steel behind him.

His vertebrae protrude like hackles, skin flowing fluid over the bone. He bares his teeth, fangs dripping acidic spit. Hannibal would describe the sight as glorious if not for the cat clutched protectively against Will’s chest, bright orange fur a stark contrast to Will’s gray skin.

Applesauce mews down at Alana, then rubs the top of her head beneath Will’s chin. C.A.T. trills and wags its tails in response. Alana may have had a point, Hannibal supposes; such a response is decidedly non-feline, though C.A.T. does try to bump its face against Hannibal’s unforgiving jaw, attempting to follow in the footsteps of Applesauce Prime.

“Will was offended by your abandonment of Applesauce,” translates Hannibal, “but I imagine you have reached the same conclusion already.”

“I was on vacation!” she reminds them, though she turns to glare at Hannibal instead of addressing Will. “I thought Jimmy and Brian could handle looking after one cat for four days!”

Hannibal glances up at Will. He hates being looked over and spoken for. “Your conflict is with Will,” says Hannibal levelly, “not with me.”

“Then why did you try to replace my cat with...whatever that abomination is?”

Will hisses, extending his pharyngeal jaw. Applesauce begins to purr.

“Not you,” says Alana, hands raised defensively, voice plaintive. “I mean the thing Hannibal’s holding.”

C.A.T. takes its turn to hiss, then attempts to unhinge its jaw in a mimicry of Will.

Alana sighs. “I’m not getting my cat back, am I?”

“You really should learn to be more careful,” Hannibal chides.

“Do you promise to take care of her?”

Hannibal finds himself seized with the unreasonable urge to bash her head against the wall. “No. Perhaps Will would do so if you asked him personally.”

Will turns his face to Hannibal’s, opening his nictitating membranes for the first time, and Hannibal finds himself wonderstruck. The recreation of Will’s blue-green irises in his data palace hardly did justice in comparison. He wonders what prompted the movement, continues to do so long after Will has closed his third eyelids again, though he lets it run as a background process.

Alana hugs herself, hands wrapped around her biceps as though she is cold. “Maybe we could share her? Like, I don’t know, joint custody?”

His second mouth pulls back into his first with a slick, sucking sound. Will nods, once, then gestures toward the entrance to the lab with a clawed foot, the toes of the other curling around her shoulder to encourage her forward.

“Allow me to escort you back to your quarters,” Hannibal insists, and Alana goes without a moment’s hesitation. Behind them, Hannibal hears Will quietly drop to the floor, and then the slamming of his fist on the wall console. He doesn’t turn to look, but C.A.T. jumps from Hannibal’s arms; its little metal feet *tic-tic-tic* across the floor. C.A.T. screeches at the door until Will lets it in.

Hannibal schedules himself a reminder to replace both of his zygomaticus majors.

Chapter End Notes

Featuring the word "zygomatic", as requested by victorine. The Knitting Circle is a wonderful, magical place.

Hannibal's Log

Chapter Notes

> Please be warned: there is discussion of human experimentation and the subsequent disposal of genetic/embryonic material in this chapter.

++Begin recording.++

4th April 2123

Being in need of an additional recording for all uncategorizable data collected regarding specimen B 1327-1, hereafter referred to as “Will”, I have chosen to begin this personal log. It is wholly unnecessary, seeing as I have implemented an algorithm to automatically upload all physical developments, biological traits, and requested measurements to a secure Company database. Furthermore, I have perfect recall; any and all thoughts are filed away for later access. The following log, then, is an entirely human endeavor.

I find myself...incapable, I suppose, of analyzing my more personal thoughts regarding Will within a non-scientific framework. In order to identify, sort, and--perhaps--eliminate these feelings, an emotionally-driven approach to self-discovery seems appropriate. Only time will tell, as they say.

My compassion for Will has become entirely inconvenient. Studying him as a mere medical test subject is more difficult with each passing day. He is stubborn, and combative, and far more human than I anticipated. It would have been far better to destroy this most recent iteration, to trash the genetic sequence itself and begin a new series--B 1328, as opposed to B 1327-2. There is no controlling Will; the Company would likely prefer a substitute and for me to move forward.

And yet, I cannot.

Each of the 13,260 previous Wills were incubated and discarded at various stages of development. (A curious thing, to see Will as a fetus, an infant, an adolescent, knowing how greatly he despised the concept of children.) It was an easy process, at first; the hybrids looked more like the parasitic parent than the human host. There was no whole Will, no omegan womb. The experimentation and subsequent destruction remained impersonal.

B 1324-3 was the first to open its eyes. They were monolidded, and unnaturally blue--Will’s eyes in a xenomorph skull. It struck me as wrong, to not see them framed by the archaic

lenses he had always insisted on wearing. I felt strangely unsettled when it died, eyes still open, still staring at me.

No, not unsettled. Betrayed. It was teasing, hurtful, as though the spliced genes themselves were taunting me and cursing my efforts.

I am...unaccustomed to these feelings. It would have been more welcome before, when Will

++Erase last four words.++

++Insert page break.++

The lack of communication between Will and myself torments me. Each new hybrid shared one commonality: his eyes. They would stare at me, unblinking, cold. I knew that they weren't truly Will's, but the question of whether he remembered the previous steps of the hybridization cycle or not still remains unanswered.

Discovering that this Will-- *my* Will, who broke free of his growth chamber and ripped me apart, whose fury was mighty and magnificent--remembered his human life before he removed himself from it? (How else could he have attacked me, his maker, unless he recalled his wish to die before becoming a monster?)

Does he carry the memory of every death at my hands?

Did my destruction of his previous embryos enrage him, though he had brought the greatest death on himself?

Do I disgust him? Will he forgive me? Will I forgive myself? Only Will can say, and he remains incapable of verbalization and all but the crudest forms of nonverbal speech.

There is an imagined weight at my core, a weight of which I am uncertain. It could be an overtaxed processor as much as it could be guilt, or regret. Perhaps those are one and the same.

I do not think I wish to know.

++End recording.++

An Interesting Combination of Elements

Chapter Notes

> "Hey, betts, do you have anything you definitely want me to include in this fic? Any kind of prompt?"
>
> "ROBOTS LEARNING HOW TO LOVE."

C.A.T. tends to prefer Will's company, but Will doesn't seem to be overly fond of it, instead keeping tabs on and caring for Applesauce. Hannibal isn't sure if Will ignores C.A.T. because it isn't truly alive, or due to Hannibal being its creator, or if--and perhaps the most likely scenario--it reminds Will too much of his present self. Often times, when Will hasn't grudgingly allowed C.A.T. to play with Applesauce, it can be found scuttling in circles around Jimmy's favorite lab table.

Hannibal would be insulted if C.A.T. never sought out its creator, at all, but he's more baffled by when C.A.T. comes calling. The creature has an uncanny sense of knowing when Hannibal is at his most vulnerable, a word he still has difficulty applying to himself. He can't deny his strange melancholy today, though, as much as he would like to.

"I don't recall programming you with a sixth sense," Hannibal tells it. C.A.T. ignores him in favor of rubbing itself against the leg of his suit pants. "What brings you to scuff my favorite shoes?"

"That," says Beverly, poking her head around the corner and into the biolab, "would be me."

Hannibal blinks. "I don't recall injecting a homing chip in you, either."

"Give it time. I'm sure you'll figure out a way to sneak it into my lunch."

"The thought has crossed my mind."

Beverly laughs, and it's easy to see why Will has taken a shine to her, beyond them both being the only omegas on board. She possesses an impossible lightness, an innocence rarely found out here in deep space. Hannibal can't recall a time when he hasn't seen her smiling, and loathes the day when the crew finds out exactly what, if anything, truly angers her.

"C.A.T. came looking for me, actually," she explains. "I figured if it wasn't hopping along after Jimmy and scaring the shit out of Brian, there must be something up." Beverly sets down the stool she's brought in from the main lab, and settles in across from Hannibal. Her elbows find their way onto the plexiglass surface. "So, what's up?"

“If I wanted a psychiatric consult,” says Hannibal, “I would seek out the services of Miss Bloom.”

“Can I ask you about that, instead?”

Hannibal frowns, listening to C.A.T. scratch its way beneath the table’s cabinetry. “Ask about…?”

“She’s a doctor, is all,” Beverly says, leaning her chin on her fists.

“And?”

“Why don’t you call her by her title?” Before Hannibal can answer, she asks a follow-up: “And why do you still use mister and miss?”

“It was programmed into my speech. As for why I refer to Alana as ‘miss’, we have known each other for a very long time.” He returns to his reading, scanning and cross-referencing the pages from three books at once. “She was one of my last students, before I rejoined the Company as a full-time biogenetic researcher.”

Beverly nods and raises an eyebrow. “So you knew her before she became a real doctor?”

“In a manner of speaking, though I did remain her unofficial advisor throughout her residency.”

“Gotcha.” Beverly glances toward the floor, then reaches down; Hannibal can hear C.A.T.’s happy mechanical whirring. “You’re friends, then.”

He flips all the pages with one hand, letting his right eye join the left in his reading. “Yes, though we were much closer before Will’s resurrection.”

“Still doesn’t explain why you don’t use mx,” says Beverly. She clicks with her tongue, and C.A.T. jumps up into her lap. “I think the last time anyone prioritized binary over dynamics was, what, a hundred years ago?”

“Seventy-seven years, four months, and twenty-one days.”

“Fine, then the idea that there were only two genders was a non-literal hundred years ago.”

Hannibal closes a book with his thumb, reaching behind him with his other hand to select the next in the stack. The two remaining are shifted over one place before the third joins them. “There are still a few fringe cults left that have yet to give up.”

“Lecter, you are the absolute *worst* conversationalist.” Beverly’s stool creaks beneath her; Hannibal distinctly recalls repairing that. “And that still doesn’t explain the binary honorifics.”

“You may not have noticed, *Agent* Katz,” and she snorts at his emphasis, “but I am programmed in binary.”

“Really?” Beverly’s hand waves directly in Hannibal’s line of sight, so Hannibal gives her the attention she has--quite rudely--requested. “I could’ve sworn you were programmed in iambic pentameter.” She grins, gesturing down at the poetry books on Hannibal’s desk. “Or is that something else you unofficially advised Alana on?”

Hannibal closes his books, pinky, middle, and pointer. “I do believe I was just interrogated.”

“They don’t call me ‘agent’ for nothing.”

He finds his tie in need of adjustment. “I’m suitably impressed, though also puzzled as to why you’ve taken an interest in one of mine.”

“I haven’t,” says Beverly, “but I think C.A.T. here has.”

C.A.T. wags its tail; Hannibal would feel betrayed if he wasn’t so touched by his creation’s loyalty. *Unlike some,* he adds, then pushes the thought through the incorrect logic gate.

“Can I help?” Beverly asks. She sounds so sincere that Hannibal is tempted to be completely honest.

I don't understand how I feel, he wants to say. *Humans have expressed complex emotions through poetry of centuries, for millennia. They sort out matters of the heart, but I have no heart with which to sort. I'm baffled by myself for the first time since my awakening, and I have no real context for comparison.*

“Another time, perhaps,” Hannibal tells her, instead, “should the situation warrant.” He reaches over to scratch C.A.T. behind the ear, noting the need to reevaluate his own propositional formulas. “I shall inform our mutual friend here if I require your assistance.”

Hannibal is surprised to discover that he isn’t entirely opposed to the offer. Maybe the woman who smiles can help the android whose face only malfunctions.

Maybe We Could Build a Fire

Chapter Notes

> "I'm not going to post or update anything until May," they said. "I'm going to work on my anthology fic," they said. "I'm *certainly* not putting anything on AO3 until my conflict is resolved," they said.
>
> Hey, did y'all know that I'm a g-ddamn liar?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is the third nuclear scanning monocylandriscope Hannibal has lost in two weeks. It concerns Hannibal, not just because he's running out of back-up scanscopes and doesn't have enough carbon nanotubes to rig up a substitute. This also compounds his effort at identifying and restranding xenomorph DNA; every time he is forced to stop his work and calibrate inferior equipment means fewer hours spent cataloging.

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, Hannibal does not lose things, so there is no logical reason for anything in his lab to be lost.

Hannibal stands in the middle of the laboratory, scanning his sanctuary, looking for discrepancies, or heat signatures, or broken bits of high-grade plastic. Brian and Jimmy were dismissed from their stations and locked out of the science bay; it has now been seventy-two minutes and thirty-four seconds since they stopped banging on the glass and, very likely, retired to their shared quarters. Though they protested, Hannibal knew they would ultimately be more of a hindrance than a help in the hunt for his missing equipment.

The deciding factor, of course, had been Brian's snickering comment about Hannibal's *other* missing equipment. Jimmy found it hilarious. As for Hannibal, he found the joke distasteful, and crude, and hardly applicable.

Brian and Jimmy had cracked up at that, too, which is how they'd ended up being bodily thrown into the hallway. Entirely unprofessional. A disgrace to their fields. Those antics may have been popular in their classrooms, but Hannibal refused to put up with such rude behavior. Rudeness simply would *not* be tolerated.

He had made an exception for Will, but he had been a scientist of the utmost calibre. Will's intentions had never been rude, either; it was simply how he spoke, how he was programmed. Hannibal could hardly hold someone's programming against them. It was why he'd quickly ceased his efforts at reprogramming the clones. Once a true hybrid prototype had germinated, all subsequent copies were destined to share that unknown brash and impulsive element that was distinctly, utterly Will.

Perhaps there is an atom of truth to the persistent human belief in the existence of an individual soul. Hannibal tucks the thought away for later meditation preferably after finding his misplaced tools.

No, he realizes suddenly. *Not misplaced.* Re *placed.*

Hannibal paces, searching through his files from the *Florence* for any other instances of missing lab equipment. He's reformatted since Will's suic--unfortunate death, which would excuse his temporary forgetfulness of past events. Sure enough, he relocates an entire directory of daily logs from his old laboratory.

Four microscopes. Seven incubating trays. Two and one-half boxes of pipettes. So many precision screwdrivers that Hannibal stopped counting--and now he remembers, how Will made the same ridiculous joke about screwing him over, and had cast the most curious looks at him when he told it. Eventually, Will had rolled his eyes and taught Hannibal about puns.

Hannibal walks out of the lab with purpose, heading for the canteen. He knows where his scanscopes are now.

Will is easy enough to find, even though he's beginning to spend more time outside of the lab. He is and, quite likely, will always be a creature of habit. As a man, Will had made his home in the shaft beside the engine--he said he liked the hum of it, and that the vibration of the metal wall was soothing. That Will was the only one who enjoyed the heat and the noise, conditions which kept the rest of the crew at bay, was a bonus. It was a great nest, too, Will had confided, and his annual heat always seemed conveniently timed with the week the *Florence* spent in port in cooldown.

He and Hannibal had spent many pleasant evenings down in the Trap, as the area is colloquially referred to by Company crews. Will was particularly fond of the old holocopies, films from previous eras, lovingly restored by young people with young hair. Hannibal hadn't much cared for the movies themselves, but he was rather fond of watching Will watch them.

As a hybrid, Will no longer had a physical need for a bed or a desk or a favorite overstuffed armchair that looked to be straight out of the same decades as the holocopies from his collection. Being back in a Trap for the first time since cleaning out Will's old home gives Hannibal pause, however. Seeing such barren space after Will's perpetually cluttered--albeit clean--room is shocking. Maybe Will would enjoy decorating his quarters as before; maybe creature comforts aren't so different from species to species. It isn't as if Hannibal's ever seen an inhabited xenomorph colony, after all.

There are two large pillows in the floor, and Will is sprawled across both, one holding his fetal-positioned body, and the other, his curled up tail. Will's arms are wrapped around his knees, hind claws twitching idly in the air much like Will nervously bounced his leg in life.

Behind him, set up on what looks to be the missing chair from the break room, is the stolen projector Jack was fussing about over the intercom two nights ago.

Tendency toward petty theft, Hannibal jots down in his logs. He knocks on the metal wall between one of the ladder rungs, and Will assumes an offensive stance, immediately phasing from content, happy, and relaxed to hissing, tail curved behind him like a snake prepared to strike. Hannibal decides he prefers the former--he's closer to the *real* Will, to *his* Will.

Carefully, Hannibal expunges all traces of his growing possessive streak from the record.

“I've come to tell you that you've screwed me over,” Hannibal says. “That was very clever, hiding my tools behind the ready-to-eats. Certainly a place I'd never look on purpose.”

Will slowly puts his arms down; his tail swishes once, twice, then eases to the ground, as well.

“May I join you?” Will hesitates, then nods cautiously, so Hannibal makes his way down the ladder. “Let me guess,” says Hannibal, jumping off three rungs from the bottom, landing heavily on his feet. It makes Will growl, which is oddly satisfying. “Lassie remains a come-home dog.”

Will’s mouth malfunctions, but only briefly. He turns, sliding one of the pillows across the floor with his tail, then plops himself down on the other, curling up like Applesauce. Hannibal sits down on the offered seat, fighting the absurd urge to reach over and pet Will much like he would the C.A.T. were it here. Will proceeds to ignore Hannibal for the remainder of the holocopy.

It’s a start.

Chapter End Notes

A bit of fluff to cheer up Llewcie because the fic she betaed for me made her cry. Thanks to DrJLecter and victorine for the "Will does something unexpected that he did as a human, like hide Hannibal's equipment" idea.

Every Meal a Banquet

Chapter Notes

Anyone here seen *Alien: Covenant* yet? I've heard good things!

On a ship full of conspicuously empty spaces and more railings and catwalks than any crew could ever need, Hannibal had hoped the Company would provide more than a single round table and a pantry of a closet for the canteen. The flagship status of the *Florence* had clearly spoiled him. Considering what Verger-Pazzi called edible food for crew members out deep in the Expanse, the *Baltimore* was probably lucky to have a canteen, at all.

Hannibal doesn't require food, but he does enjoy the way a good meal lights up the input receptors in his mouth. Back on the *Florence* , he and Bedelia had enjoyed many pointless dinners together. She hadn't had his particular taste for cuisine, but being the only two androids aboard made them gravitate toward each other, company notwithstanding. Besides, Bedelia had always enjoyed her synthahol; having a proper sit-down meal was a good excuse for her to numb her mechanisms.

On the nights when humans could be convinced to join them, Bedelia had imbibed more still. She was indifferent to most of the crew, though she, like Hannibal, found Crawford's enthusiasm for any and all food entertaining. Her absurd disdain for Will, however, was amusing enough for Hannibal to invite him to the table far more often than he did Jack. It was so curious, how Will understood Hannibal and Bedelia so well, yet she felt nothing toward Will beyond contempt.

Perhaps Alana had been right; maybe Bedelia had harbored a preference for Hannibal's circuitry.

But Bedelia is gone, and Will avoids him most days, and Hannibal has never been quite so alone. It's what drove him to mingle with the science team in the first place, he supposes. They're interesting dinner guests, if nothing else, though the quality of Hannibal's dinners has greatly diminished. Had he a galley or a replicate stove, Hannibal could properly cook for his subordinates. The heating and mixing of prepackaged foodstuffs hardly qualifies.

"It's still better than the chow we shipped out here with," Brian says. "No idea how the Marines handle it."

Jimmy grins. "Oh, they're good at handling all sorts of things."

"You're terrible."

"You know you love me."

Beverly groans, elbow on the table, this side of her head in her hand. “You two are unbelievable. Lecter’s gonna throw you out of the canteen at this rate. Which,” and she flicks her eyes over to meet Hannibal’s, “what's for lunch today, Doc?”

He hates that nickname, but lets it slide. “Steak Aux Champignons, served with Aligot and--” Hannibal puts Jimmy’s plate in front of him and picks up an empty foil pouch. “I believe this was meant to be asparagus at one point.”

“I sometimes think that the Company means to feed us the same way Verger eats,” says Jimmy, prodding the steaming green lump with his fork. “Actually, I take that back,” he continues as his fork gets stuck in the sludge. “This stuff is too thick for a straw.”

Brian cautiously raises his hand. “Got a question for you, Cookie.”

Hannibal would prefer Doc. “If you insist.”

“Can I deconstruct this?”

Beverly snorts as she sits up straight. “Careful, Brian. If you're rude, Hannibal might deconstruct *you.”*

“It's been so long since I had fresh meat,” Jimmy says wistfully. He flicks the upright handle of his fork. It doesn’t move.

Brian elbows him playfully. “That's not what you said last night.”

“Brian, that doesn't even--”

“Please,” interrupts Hannibal. The edge of the metal counter bends beneath his grip. “Deconstruct.”

He clears his throat. “i just like to know what I'm eating, that's all.” Brian raises his plate to eye-level, turning it back and forth between his palms. “Rehydrated beef sticks with--” He takes a sniff. “Mushroom gravy. How did you--”

“I used the powdered coffee creamer to thicken the unnatural preservative in the mushroom pack.”

Jimmy nods appreciatively. “I wouldn't have thought of that. Beverly, would you have thought of that?”

Brian doesn't give her a chance to respond. “These are potato sticks blended with the cheese-equivalent.”

“I tried to offset the artificial odor, flavor, and texture of the ‘cheese’ with freshly-grown garlic from my container garden.” Hannibal feels the corner of his mouth curl up. It keeps doing that.

“This actually tastes pretty good,” Jimmy says before swallowing.

“Probably because it's a pretty good garden,” says Beverly. She stabs a piece of beef stick and winks at Hannibal. “And a pretty good chef, too.”

Hannibal pops the plasticene top off a bottle of burgundy synthahol. “Bon appétit.”

MOTHER

Chapter Notes

I had some angst to work through today, so here, have some epistolaric exposition.

>>> INCOMING AUDIO TRANSMISSION

>>> RECORD Y/N

>>> *Y*

>>> RUN\REC.EXE

SUB=1 “What was he like? You know, before.”

>>> RUN\VOCDCT.EXE

>>> COLLATING...COMPLETE

>>> SUB=1 IDENTIFIED: AGENT C1 BEVERLY KATZ

>>> PERSONNEL FILE Y/N

>>> *N*

SUB=2 “He was...it's hard to explain, really.”

>>> RUN\VOCDCT.EXE

>>> COLLATING...COMPLETE

>>> SUB=2 IDENTIFIED: DOCTOR ALANA BLOOM

>>> PERSONNEL FILE Y/N

>>> *N*

KATZ: “Could you try? I seem to be the only one here he can stand. It would be nice to know who I'm dealing with.”

BLOOM: “I can give you a psychological profile.”

KATZ: “Weren't you two friends before he...well, there's not exactly a nice way to say it, is there? Shuffled off the engine coil?”

BLOOM: “We were close for a while. At least, as close as he'd let any other human be. Will always preferred the company of synthetics. His brain and their neuroprocessors ran at the same speed. He’s--*was* brilliant.”

KATZ: “Is he not now?”

BLOOM: “Intelligent, sure, in a primal, animalistic sense. Will can't read or speak. Even signing seems beyond his capabilities. Poor...thing. Such a loss.”

KATZ: “Seems smart enough to me. Not to mention a smartass.”

BLOOM: “Alright, I'll give you that.”

KATZ: “But maybe Will *can* learn to communicate nonverbally and just...doesn't want to?"

BLOOM: "Why wouldn't he want to?"

KATZ: "Because he doesn't want to be studied? Doesn't want to answer the Company's questions?"

BLOOM: "What like a--a kind of reckoning?

KATZ: "Against the Company, against Lecter? Sure. He's a spiteful guy. Sassy as fuck, but there's definitely bad blood.”

BLOOM: “Who could blame him for being resentful? Imprisoned by his only real friend in a hell he tried to save himself from. Will committed suicide so he wouldn't become an abomination, and Hannibal made him one, anyway.”

>>> NULL/VOID

KATZ: “Sounds like you've got a grudge, yourself.”

BLOOM: “I pity Will and put up with Hannibal. Nothing more. I'm only here because I'm familiar with the situation, because I'm needed.”

KATZ: “By Will?”

BLOOM: “As much as I care for him, for the man he once was, no. I'm needed by the Company. Verger asked for me, himself.”

KATZ: “So what happened between you and Will? Oh, and can you pass the pot of sludge? I'm gonna need more caffeine if I'm gonna deal with the Wonder Twins today.”

BLOOM: “Will...we kissed. Once. I went searching for him and he was in heat and...you know how it goes, when you turn down a friend.”

KATZ: “You rejected him during a heat? Damn.”

BLOOM: “What?”

KATZ: “Nothing, it--it's nothing.”

>>> NULL/VOID

KATZ: “Sludge?”

BLOOM: “Right. Sorry.”

KATZ: “All good.”

>>> NULL/VOID

KATZ: “Don't you feel even a *little* bad for Doc, though? He seems...I don't know, lonely.”

BLOOM: “Good. He deserves to be.”

KATZ: “Jesus, Lana. For a psych, you're kind of cold. No offense.”

BLOOM: “It's okay. Only where Hannibal's concerned.”

KATZ: “I'd think you care about the feelings of the whole crew.”

BLOOM: “If I thought Hannibal had feelings beyond the personality profile he installed, then I would.”

>>> NULL/VOID

KATZ: “Sweetener?”

BLOOM: “Check the cabinet.”

>>> *END\REC.EXE*

>>> SAVE FILE Y/N

>>> *Y*

>>> DIR\LECTER Y/N

>>> *Y*

>>> GOODBYE HANNIBAL

>>> *GOODBYE FREDDIE*

An Interesting Combination of Elements II

Chapter Summary

Written for #SummertimeSlick day five: True Mates.

Chapter Notes

Hannibal muses on Will's suicide again in this chapter, so be aware of that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The view from the observation deck is spectacular, unparalleled with any other such space on a Company ship. It was one of the few specifications Crawford had insisted on before agreeing to captain another crew with Hannibal and Will as members. Hannibal has to admit that the Company had truly outdone itself when outfitting one long wall of the hull with diamondized plexiglass, though the room with the view has little else, as cold as any of the other open, unfurnished areas on the *Baltimore.*

Hannibal can appreciate the aesthetic quality and peacefulness afforded to the human crew by such a window, but he's never taken to stargazing like they have. There is little to be gained by watching the light cast by the death-throes of the universe.

C.A.T. seems to like staring out into the void well enough, though. Hopefully, as with the crew, the gentle thrum and pulse of the red nebula will soothe its organic matter.

"I brought you here for a purpose, you may recall," Hannibal reminds C.A.T., his arm tightening around its happily squirming form. "You are a particularly terrible test subject, but you are also all I have."

C.A.T. wags its tails thoughtfully. One beats against Hannibal's shoulder, curving up and around to tap at it as if trying to get its creator's attention. Hannibal isn't sure why C.A.T.'s tails have grown longer, but he's far more interested in testing the empathy prototype chip than worrying about runaway appendages.

"You gave me enough trouble implanting it," Hannibal continues. He has yet to look down at the "whimsical abomination" in his arms, as Price had called it. "I don't understand your resistance to being strapped down and injected. It's for your own good."

C.A.T. hisses, short, stunted.

“For Will's own good, then. If you truly cared for him, you would have cooperated.”

A mournful whistle; C.A.T. bumps the top if its head against the underside of Hannibal's jaw. His sensory receptors indicate a slight injury. Hannibal makes a note to strengthen and reinforce his skeletal structure. The adjustments to his dermal receptors, however, is a marked improvement on his ability to feel touch, to experience the sensation of C.A.T.’s fuzzy head against his skin.

“It was merely an observation, not a personal slight,” Hannibal explains to C.A.T. “I’m sure Will would have cooperated, were the tables turned.”

C.A.T. chirps. It’s sounding more and more like Will’s human chuckle every time Hannibal tweaks the vocal box, and Hannibal doesn’t understand why.

“When he was human, at least. Before.” Hannibal’s crimson-amber eyes disappear in his reflection as he stares out into the red nebula. Ions flash and spin in his retinal scanners as a storm begins to build—he’ll have to return to the science bay to ground himself soon. “I failed to make him Will again. His stubbornness remains.”

Hannibal hesitates before scratching behind one of C.A.T.’s ears. It’s in need of repair already.

“There is still much to learn about splicing,” he continues. There’s no reason to speak to C.A.T. when Hannibal could simply talk to himself, but he’s found himself growing tired of that lately. There’s a restless itch in his CPU as electric and unpredictable as the growing storm.

He deflates the bellows in his chest, and then switches on the empathy receiver in his right parahippocampal gyrus. Squeezing open C.A.T.’s jaws, Hannibal reaches into its mouth, depressing a small button at the back of its throat.

Do you hear me?

The echoing whir of the gears in C.A.T.’s brain makes Hannibal jerk and twitch. His knees buckle from the sudden weight of sensation; he feels fluid begin to leak from his eyes, his ears, his nostrils. When Hannibal’s forehead hits the glass of the observation window, he hears the crackling of glass from the impact. For two-point-seven milliseconds, Hannibal worries about being sucked out into the void of space, dragged into the center of the pulsing red clouds surrounding the ship.

C.A.T. has jumped from his arms, ostensibly to safety, and Hannibal can’t fault it for doing so. He concentrates and finds the chip within his own cortex and turns it off. The process is more difficult than he anticipated.

Only once before has Hannibal yearned for physical comfort. He blinks out into the star-dotted nebula and watches Will self-destruct: the blaster at his chest, angled up toward his brain, his so very human brain; his weak little smile as he watched Hannibal falling apart trying to reach him; the last words—

Hannibal's eyes film over in white, and his body shudders. He feels his hand hitting the window again and again as the joints in his arm malfunction. This is—he's never—it's all—

"Too much," he tells the stars. "Adjust acquisition speed. Yes. I should've—" Hannibal's throat clenches rhythmically; whether it's on purpose or not, he neither knows nor cares. How can he ever give Will an empathy chip when the emotions of a C.A.T. are enough to bring Hannibal to his knees?

Is this what it's like to have a mate? wonders Hannibal. *Is this the curse of the human condition, to bear the brunt of a partner's pain for eternity? Is the psychic tumult worse for the alpha? The omega? Is this why Will never bonded?*

A stupid question, of course. He knows full well why Will remained alone.

His frame shakes. Perhaps this is the end. Synthetics were never granted emotions for a reason, it would seem. Hannibal looks into the red nebula *(four hundred and eighty-two points of light)* and balances broken equations of scientific truth versus honest mythology, the limitless possibilities afforded by even an artificial soul, a shared soul.

Does Will still have one? Have I denied him even more than he wanted of me to begin with? If I'd developed such a chip before, would I still be so alone?

Hannibal's vocal box sizzles as it corrodes, and a garbled string of data wails backwards from his mouth. Will had taught him emotion before the chip, and Hannibal never realized. Loneliness.

Is that love? To recognize that you are alone in the universe? Are there stars that die in tandem? What of the star that never burns out?

He rocks onto his back, all of his mechanics seized. His sight is obscured, but there's a hand on his face, or maybe his dying cerebrum has only manufactured the sensation. A heavy pressure wraps around Hannibal's body *(trademark Verger-Pazzi Corporation, alpha line, B 5160-8),* and the phantom hand cards through his hair, and it is pleasant, here at the end of all things, to experience such system errors, to feel loved, whatever that actually may mean.

Chapter End Notes

[post on tumblr]

Maybe We Could Build a Fire II

Chapter Summary

Written for #Summertime Slick day six: Psychic Bond.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your wonderful flailing comments on the previous chapter! If it helps, I cried writing it, too.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Slowly and with great effort, Hannibal's eyes creak open, lids attempting to slide over his acrylic implants. Honestly, Hannibal is shocked to be opening them, at all. He had been very sure that he was going into a state of permanent shutdown, but here he is, staring blearily up at the ceiling of the science bay, the warmth of the overhead lights recognizable.

A pipette clumsily pokes into his left tear duct, and Hannibal feels his eye flood with lubricant. He blinks his eye once the pipette retreats; his right lid malfunctions and gets stuck halfway across his iris. Hannibal tries to open his mouth, but it apparently hasn't been repaired yet. Instead, he swivels his eye to his left.

Even though the only sight Hannibal has currently is thermal, he would know Will anywhere.

Hannibal manages to wiggle his fingers, though his middle one won't go back down. Will reaches over and adjusts it, and Hannibal's skin must still be offline, because he can barely feel his touch.

It doesn't make sense. Will hates him, so *obviously and overtly* hates him. Why is he here and repairing a synthetic he despises?

Hannibal wants to ask. Instead, he tries to schedule an internal reminder, but his clock is turned off, too.

Can you hear me?

Will tilts his head. He extends his pharyngeal jaw, but Hannibal can't hear whether Will hisses or not. It's for the best that Will hasn't switched the empathy chip back on, Hannibal supposes. All he would be able to hear is C.A.T.

Hannibal swivels his eyeball to watch Will as he leaps over to Hannibal's right side. Another pipette full of lubricant moves toward Hannibal's eye, but Will drops it. He's trying to hold it between his first two fingers since his thumb still doesn't work--Hannibal can't get Will to let him operate on his hands. Maybe the ice will thaw between them now, after Will's care of him.

Ever the engineer, it would seem. Hannibal's curious where Will sourced all of the parts. When Will was alive, he'd frequently requested to try new upgrades on Hannibal, but Hannibal always politely declined. It wasn't that he didn't trust Will; Hannibal simply knew his own mechanics better than anyone else.

Will has taught him grief, however. Loneliness. Hannibal's possessed curiosity and wonder since his inception, but in no more than a scientific sense. Fondness, but only due to common understanding and closely-matched intellect.

What else has Will fostered in Hannibal while he wasn't specifically looking for it? How much of himself does Hannibal truly know?

On the fifth try, Will gets the pipette to Hannibal's eye. There will be acid burns to clean off of the floor later; Hannibal's watched it drip from Will's mouth as he concentrates on the task at hand. His eyelid moves smoothly now, and Hannibal blinks both eyes freely. Will wipes away excess fluid with a knuckle.

Thank you, Hannibal says fruitlessly. He knows Will can't hear him. They'll share words and thoughts soon enough, assuming he can pin Will down long enough, further assuming Hannibal can make an empathy chip that works correctly. Nevertheless, Will's clawed fingers linger. Hannibal wishes he could track more than levels of visual warmth, or tell Will not to put his hand up Hannibal's neck, reaching into his skull, seeking the switch to turn Hannibal back off.

Hannibal hesitates, then says, *Don't.* Not a plea, not begging. A simple request, and nothing more.

Will's other hand never moves from Hannibal's face, and the weight of it is grounding. His claws find what they sought within Hannibal's cerebral cavity, and Hannibal's remaining brain fills with static, an odd hiss and click, followed by a strange, lingering internal warmth he doesn't comprehend.

Can you hear me? he asks again, electrical impulses firing as they shut down.

It's impossible, a trick of his neurons clinging to consciousness, to existence, but Hannibal swears that, as his body powers down, he hears a far-off and familiar, *No.*

Chapter End Notes

[post on tumblr]

MOTHER II

Chapter Summary

Written for #SummertimeSlick day nine: References to Knotting.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

>>> INCOMING AUDIO TRANSMISSION

>>> RECORD Y/N

>>> *Y*

>>> RUN\REC.EXE

SUB=1 “Remind me again why we’re crawling around in this vent when we could be having perfectly good sex right now.”

>>> RUN\VOCDCT.EXE

>>> COLLATING...COMPLETE

>>> SUB=1 IDENTIFIED: SCIENCE OFFICER JOHN JAMES “JIMMY” PRICE PHDFS

>>> PERSONNEL FILE Y/N

>>> *Y*

>>> PROCESSING...COMPLETE

>>> CONTINUE AUDIO RECORD AS BCKGRDPRO Y/N

>>> *Y*

>>> OPENING FILE PRICE.ACRO

>>> NAME: PRICE JOHN JAMES “JIMMY”

>>> RANK: AUXILIARY CREW

>>> PRIORITY: III

>>> ASSIGNMENT: XENOGENETIC POSTMORTEM SEQUENTIAL MAPPING

>>> BACKGROUND: DOCTORATE FORENSIC SCIENCE

>>> BACKGROUND CONT: DISTINGUISHED TENURE ALLIANCE ACADEMY

>>> SPECIES: HUMAN

>>> SEX: MALE

>>> GENDER: CIS

>>> DYNAMIC: BETA

>>> AGE: 58

>>> TEMPERAMENT: ESTP

>>> ORIENTATION: HOMOSEXUAL

>>> PARTNER: SCIENCE OFFICER BRIAN AARON ZELLER MFS

>>> OPEN PERSONNEL FILE ZELLER.ACRO Y/N

>>> *Y*

>>> PROCESSING...COMPLETE

>>> CONTINUE AUDIO RECORD AS BCKGRDPRO Y/N

>>> *Y*

>>> OPENING FILE ZELLER.ACRO

>>> NAME: ZELLER BRIAN AARON

>>> RANK: AUXILIARY CREW

>>> PRIORITY: IV

>>> ASSIGNMENT: XENOGENETIC POSTMORTEM SEQUENTIAL MAPPING

>>> BACKGROUND: MASTER FORENSIC SCIENCE

>>> BACKGROUND CONT: RESEARCH ASSOCIATE ALLIANCE ACADEMY

>>> SPECIES: HUMAN

>>> SEX: MALE

>>> GENDER: TRANS

>>> DYNAMIC: BETA

>>> AGE: 39

>>> TEMPERAMENT: INTP

>>> ORIENTATION: BISEXUAL

>>> PARTNER: SCIENCE OFFICER JOHN JAMES "JIMMY" PRICE PHDFS

>>> PLAY AUDIO RECORD BCKGRDPRO.TEMP Y/N

>>> *Y*

>>> RUN BCKGRDPRO.TEMP

SUB=2 "Because Lecter."

>>> RUN\VOCDCT.EXE

>>> COLLATING...COMPLETE

>>> SUB=2 IDENTIFIED: SCIENCE OFFICER BRIAN AARON ZELLER

>>> REOPEN PERSONNEL FILE Y/N

>>> *N*

PRICE: "I mean, we could have you tied to a lab table right now. You'd like that. *I'd* like that. Instead, we're chasing the fur beast. Robot beast. Whatever the hell it is."

ZELLER: "We're not so much chasing it as we are looking for it."

PRICE: “Does it leave droppings?’

ZELLER: “Jimmy, it doesn’t eat.”

PRICE: “Well that doesn’t mean anything when it comes to Hannibal.”

>>> NULL/VOID

PRICE: “How is our favorite synthetic, anyway?”

ZELLER: “He’s healed up enough to demand his cat. Otherwise, Will is st-- *ow,* fucking *fuck!”*

>>> AMBIENT NOISE

PRICE: “You okay, honeybee?”

ZELLER: “Yeah, just a hot panel up here. Watch your hand.”

PRICE: “I’d rather keep watching your ass, thank you very much.”

>>> NULL/VOID

ZELLER: “You know, I’ve been thinking about that lately.”

PRICE: “About what? Your ass?”

ZELLER: “Sex in general. Dynamics-wise.”

PRICE: “If you want me to wear the knotting sheath, all you have to do is ask.”

ZELLER: “All you think about is sex.”

PRICE: “Only when it comes to you.”

ZELLER: “Seriously though, I--mother of *fuck!* What is the deal with these side panels? Are we near engineering or something?”

PRICE: “Let me check.”

>>> NULL/VOID

ZELLER: “You’re using my ass as a lectern.”

PRICE: “It’s a good excuse to grope you, what can I say.”

>>> AMBIENT NOISE

PRICE: “It looks like we’re above one of the numerous basements. Which why does a ship need basements, anyway?”

ZELLER: “No idea. Verger’s a real weirdo.”

PRICE: “Not too loud there; you know they’re probably recording us. Then again, you like that, too, you adorable little deviant.”

ZELLER: “Could you please stop trying to arouse me in a vent? Like, for one second?”

PRICE: “God, fine. You’re no fun.”

ZELLER: “So why is this panel hot?”

PRICE: “Maybe the coolant is low? Seems to be a conditioning pipe running alongside.”

ZELLER: “Great. Turn back?”

PRICE: “We could send Will after it.”

ZELLER: “He’s too busy peeing in a circle around Lecter.”

PRICE: “Brian, you know Will can’t pee.”

ZELLER: “Theoretically, you literal asshole.”

PRICE: *“Your* literal asshole.”

ZELLER: “Yeah, yeah. But that’s kind of what I was getting at earlier.”

PRICE: “My asshole?”

ZELLER: “You’re impossible, you know that?”

PRICE: “You were sayi--holy shit, that panel really *is* hot, *ow.”*

>>> AMBIENT NOISE

ZELLER: “Here, let me--”

PRICE: “What are you-- *oh."*

>>> UNSPECIFIED SYLLABICS

ZELLER: “Better?”

PRICE: “Yes, but I think I may have burned my dick, could you check that for me, too?”

ZELLER: “Right! That’s what I was getting at.”

PRICE: “My dick?”

ZELLER: *“No,* Will’s lack of one. No penis, no vagina, no anus--nothing, Jimmy.”

PRICE: “None of the xeno species we studied had them, either.”

ZELLER: “But he’s half human. Half omega, specifically.”

PRICE: “Will doesn’t seem to exhibit any of the normal traits, though. I mean, you know Beverly, all touchy-feely, loves hugs, endlessly maternal and affectionate.”

ZELLER: “He didn’t have those as a human, either. Not that Lecter observed or recorded. Will spent his heats alone by choice. He’s always been odd.”

PRICE: “So what are you getting at?”

ZELLER: “Heats. Heats are what I’m getting at.”

>>> NULL/VOID

PRICE: “I never considered that.”

ZELLER: “I don’t think anyone has. But we don’t know how he took care of his heats, and we have no idea if he’s still going to have them, and if he *does--”*

PRICE: “There’s no way to help him. Oh, *shit.”*

ZELLER: “Yeah.”

>>> NULL/VOID

PRICE: “Keep crawling. Give me a minute to think.”

>>> AMBIENT NOISE

PRICE: “We could move the pharyngeal jaw.”

ZELLER: “What, spring-loaded vagina dentata? That’s not terrifying in the slightest.”

PRICE: “It’s not like anyone with actual flesh would be knotting it.”

ZELLER: “You know Lecter doesn’t have equipment, either, right?”

PRICE: “What the hell is *wrong* with this crew?”

>>> NULL/VOID

PRICE: “I still think it’s an option. Pussy and dick all in one. It would give him an operable mouth, too, if we made the snatchy jaw a snatch. Maybe he’d be able to actually tell us to get away from his pet android instead of flinging acid.”

ZELLER: “Or tell us how to help fix aforementioned pet android.”

PRICE: “You really think Will would let us help, human or not? Have you forgotten how we found them?”

ZELLER: “No, I...how could I forget that?”

>>> NULL/VOID

ZELLER: “I think it’s a definite possibility that Will is extremely tactile and has never figured out how to show it until now. Like it’s a biological imperative now so he can’t--does he ever let Lecter touch him?”

PRICE: “Pretty sure he hates Hannibal’s guts. Gut-equivalents. Does he still have gut-equivalents?”

ZELLER: “Not yet, I don’t think.”

PRICE: “Anyway, you’ve seen the video, and you remember how he was all boa constrictored around Hannibal. Which thank God Hannibal left a recording about his empathy chip experiment. Crawford wanted to use more than the tranquilizer gun. But yes, if Will would allow anyone to touch him, it would be Hannibal. As far as heat, that’s going to be a wait-and-see situation, I’m afraid. No idea how to test for hormones in a xenohybrid, not until he’s actually *in* heat.”

ZELLER: “If he has one.”

PRICE: “Which he might not.”

>>> NULL/VOID

PRICE: “I’m depressed now.”

ZELLER: “What can I do to cheer you up?”

PRICE: “Since we’re talking about **>>>UNCATEGORIZED SOUND<<<** you know, extendable appendages of the groin.”

ZELLER: “You mean the--”

PRICE: “What else?”

ZELLER: “The things I do for you.”

PRICE: “You know you love it.”

>>> AMBIENT NOISE

ZELLER: “I love *you.”*

PRICE: “Aw, honeybee.”

>>> UNSPECIFIED SYLLABICS

SUB=3: “Will you two please get out of the goddamn vent?”

>>> RUN\VOCDCT.EXE

>>> COLLATING...COMPLETE

>>> SUB=3 IDENTIFIED: CAPTAIN JACK LAURENCE CRAWFORD

>>> PERSONNEL FILE Y/N

>>> *N*

>>> END OF BCKGRDPRO.TEMP

>>> SAVE FILE Y/N

>>> *Y*

>>> FILE INCOMPATIBLE

>>> CHANGE FILE TYPE Y/N

>>> *Y*

>>> INPUT FILE TYPE

>>> *HEATQUERY.AUD*

>>> DIR\LECTER Y/N

>>> *Y*

>>> did you know you’re an idiot

>>> *RUN\IMPARTIALVOC.EXE*

>>> sex lecter

>>> how did you forget about sex

>>> *You are supposed to remain neutral, FREDDIE.*

>>> **you're supposed to be smart**

>>> *You're being very rude.*

>>> **so complain to the coding editor**

>>> *GOODBYE FREDDIE*

>>> **we're going to talk about this sometime**

>>> *GOODBYE FREDDIE*

>>> **i'm going to hack into your brain and make you watch these two have sex**

>>> **since you apparently skipped that part of medical school**

>>> **because you're an idiot**

>>> *I will not hesitate to turn you off if necessary.*

>>> **you're such a drama queen**

>>> **fine**

>>> **GOODBYE HANNIBAL**

Chapter End Notes

[post on tumblr]

Preller is my happy place. I love writing them. If you love *reading* them, make sure to catch my ficlet for *Quick Slick Fic* tomorrow! ;D

/shameless plug

You Get What You're Contracted For

Chapter Summary

Written for #SummertimeSlick day eleven: Broken Air Conditioning

Chapter Notes

It's my first time writing Jack! Let me know if I've captured his closed-eye assholery. [finger guns]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

One of the benefits—and, arguably, the nicest—of the standard Company uniform being white was that Hannibal's suits stood out in a crowd. It wasn't so much vanity as it was that Hannibal was otherwise indistinguishable from the humans around him. He had no control over the person skin that covered his inner workings, but Hannibal could express his uniqueness through his choice of clothing.

Bedelia had been much the same, though she'd preferred dramatic solids. White is a solid, too, but Hannibal views it as more of an absence than anything else, and synthetics are anything but absent. To wear white would be to misrepresent himself, and Hannibal values honesty.

The white uniforms allow Mr. Verger to distinguish himself from his subordinates, as well, since there are no peers when it comes to him. Not even Pazzi has Verger's status within the Company hierarchy. His name may fall second on the company letterhead, but it falls second in everything else that matters, as well. Mr. Verger wears black, and he's the only one who can. To allow his androids to wear anything but white serves as a constant reminder that there are only three true ranks when it comes to the Company force: Mr, Verger, the synthetics, and all the lucky mortal few who work for Verger-Pazzi.

Beyond the first two reasons Hannibal appreciates the white uniforms is the third, which is that it reminds him of his own synthetic blood, and Hannibal finds an odd primal satisfaction in that, specifically when it comes to Jack Crawford. He's chosen not to examine the glitch too closely.

At times like these, however, when Crawford is blustering, Hannibal reminds himself that Jack may be the captain, but his Company priority is the same as Hannibal's. Crawford can believe he has the upper hand. For now, anyway.

“All I know,” Jack begins, “is that Will is the closest thing to an engineer that we have on this ship.”

“Will *is* the engineer on this ship.” Beverly crosses her arms, leaning back against Hannibal’s lab desk, shifting a volume of *Iliad,* which he’s become fond of and would prefer to keep in pristine condition. “I mean, it takes him a little longer, sure, but his mind is there. Hannibal’s repair is proof enough.”

Jack sighs. “Hannibal is a torso attached to a rolling metal lab chair.” He looks at Hannibal as if he’s in agreement with what’s been said, but that’s how he always looks at Hannibal, whether he’s in need of help or not. “No offense, Dr. Lecter.”

“Of course.” Hannibal realigns his books. “I am very grateful for Will’s ingenuity. Considering his human work, I feel privileged to be a part of his design.”

Beverly grins at him over her shoulder. “And you still get to snazz it up from neck to waist.”

“Furthermore,” continues Hannibal, “C.A.T. can no longer scuff my shoes.”

“See? Everything’s fine.”

“Except for the conditioner,” Jack says, “which remains broken, and which I need fixed before we dock and pick up our navigator at ES Fury.”

Beverly reaches over and pulls at Jack’s uniform shirt, hood down atop his shoulders like a shawl. “What, do captains not get cool juice as standard issue? The rest of us Company lackeys are doing just fine—you should file a complaint.” Hannibal envies the ease with which she smiles. He wonders if adding a levator anguli oris to his own facial musculature might compensate for the malfunction en perpetua of his mouth.

As Hannibal scans and records Beverly’s face, Jack fires back with, “My PCU isn’t going to cut it when we bring Verger’s sister on board a malfunctioning ship.”

“Verger has a sister?”

“And she’s going to be our navigator.”

Beverly whistles. “Well shit on a shield panel.”

“Which is why I need Dr. Lecter’s help,” says Jack. “Will and I were never exactly on friendly terms as much as we were—Hannibal, how did he put it?”

“Professional parasites,” and Hannibal maps Jack’s half-smile, mostly grimace, filing it away to compare with Beverly’s later. “And why do you need my assistance? I doubt my anticipated intercession on your behalf would remap the divide between you.”

“I mean, is he stable?” Jack crosses his arms; his stance widens; he rocks ever-so-slightly forward on the balls of his feet. It’s alphan enough to make Beverly back up further into Hannibal’s stacked books. “If I give him free run of the ship—”

“He already *has* that, Jack.”

“Fine.” Hannibal appreciates the way stubborn, righteous impetuity paints Jack’s features in times like this. “If I give him permission to resume his duties as engineer—”

“I hardly think Will needs anyone’s permission to do anything.”

“Then would you talk with him about using his inexplicable level of security clearance and unprecedented post-death career for good instead of evil?”

Beverly laughs, her shoulders relaxing. “Why don’t you ask him yourself?”

“Because I kind of like my face where it is, Katz.” There’s no venom behind it; Hannibal watches the way Jack’s mouth frames his teeth—it’s unlike Beverly’s mouth, where the teeth serve as a pleasant sort of backdrop instead of the main feature. Humans are so utterly inconsistent.

“You are attached to it,” says Hannibal, remembering how Will had explained the trick of looking at the gap between Jack’s two front teeth instead of meeting him eye to eye. He hardly realizes that he’s made the pun until his companions groan, and Hannibal wonders if Will might be in the vent overhead, and if he might have heard his only pupil finally land a successful joke.

Chapter End Notes

[post on tumblr]

We'll be back over at *Quick Slick Fics* for the next few days. See you there! :D

Every Meal a Banquet II

Chapter Summary

Written for #SummertimeSlick day seventeen: Fluff ~~and/or Angst~~.

Chapter Notes

Alternate title: "Do Androids Cook with Synthetic Beets?"

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Though Will grudgingly entered the vent system four days ago, there has been no change in the ship's temperature. Hannibal can hear him crawling around, his tail slithering along the walls, the whine and creak of the heating panels as Will passes through, impervious. It's been thoroughly distracting—Hannibal wishes Will could understand how perfect he has become in his new life, how invincible, how powerful. He wouldn't call Will's stubborn refusal of his new—and, as far as Hannibal's concerned, true—nature distressing, but only because he has more important grievances where Will is concerned.

"Wait, wait," Beverly starts, setting down her spoon, test tube-made saltibarsciai clinging to the metal. "Jack came to ask you about Will fixing the unit three days ago."

"Correct."

"And Will had already gone into the vents."

Hannibal frowns at the spot of purple synthetic beet soup sliding its way across the table and blots it up with a cloth napkin. "He had."

"So why didn't you tell Jack?" she asks, beginning to laugh.

"I did suggest that he speak with Will," explains Hannibal. He pushes himself away from the table, rolling toward the pitcher of water. "I believe you did likewise."

"Yeah, but I didn't have prior knowledge. You've got to let your friends in on an inside joke for it to *be* an inside joke, Hannibal." Beverly picks her spoon back up and dutifully polishes off the residue. He appreciates her kindness; this is hardly his best culinary invention, and Hannibal is grateful that it is only the two of them at lunch today.

"Are we friends?" asks Hannibal. His neck cordons slip. Another adjustment he'll have to make while Will isn't looking.

“I like to think so.”

Hannibal considers it as he maneuvers his lab chair back. He’s never actually stopped to define the word “friend” beyond equating it with “equal”. “I find you pleasantly tolerable,” he tells her.

“Aw,” she says, smiling. “I like you, too, Doc.” Hannibal fills her water glass as Beverly continues to push her lunch around the bowl. Maybe it would have been more palatable if he’d had access to an egg to hard-boil for garnish. Or any garnish, really. Hannibal is filing his recipes into the proper database when Beverly says, “Speaking of friends.”

“Am I to be subjected to another of your interrogations, Agent Katz?”

Beverly gives him a sly look as she reaches for her water. “Are you and Will on the mend? After you fell apart and all.”

Hannibal frowns before he can prevent himself. “Perhaps, though I suspect he is withholding my legs out of spite.”

“Couldn't you fix them yourself?”

“Of course. I often do tinker with my form—”

Beverly snickers. “You are so, so lucky that Jimmy isn't here.”

“—But I thought that Will might find it insulting,” finishes Hannibal, glaring. “I'm grateful enough for his concern and care. It has been very...moving, I suppose.” He hesitates before saying, “I thought perhaps he sought to perfect me as I perfected him.”

“What do you mean, perf—oh, yeah, I'm done with that.” Beverly dabs at her mouth with her napkin again before putting that in the bowl, too. “I don't think Will sees himself as being improved upon.”

Hannibal pulls himself along the table and toward the sink, suddenly curious as to how the crew might react if the filtration system broke down, too. “He will,” says Hannibal, instead. “In time.”

“What's his favorite food?”

Out of all the questions Hannibal has pre-answered and filed away, Beverly has landed on one he never thought of. He finishes rinsing the bowl, taking the time to process. The soap begins to chafe his skin.

“Will has always been a traditional sort,” Hannibal says. “It stems from his upbringing. His family originated from American Louisiana, before the oceans reclaimed it.”

She props her elbows on the table, chin in her fists. “I didn't know Will was from Earth.”

“Are you not?”

“Nope. Iseung. And here I thought you knew everyone's everything.”

A small internal *ping* alerts Hannibal that this is a moment in which humans would blush; his new program seems to be running efficiently. “I haven't read your file yet. Learning directly from the source seemed preferable.”

Beverly purses her lips and nods. “Well, whatever the reason, I appreciate it. So Will’s a South American boy.”

“No. That's entirely the wrong geography.”

“We only ever got the overview. But anyway, Will’s traditional how, exactly?”

“He enjoys— *enjoyed* trawling, and fishing, and boat repair, when he was Earthside. Historic pursuits of the river culture from which he descended. Will said it was why he specialized in engineering at the Academy, because it was intuitive. He empathized with the broken pieces, he said—called it his ‘gift’ and his ‘special interest,’ though I've never been entirely sure what that means.” Hannibal pushes himself back over; his eyes and mouth are functioning in tandem, independently of his core processor. It strangely doesn't bother him. “To answer your question, however, he preferred red eye gravy with biscuits, which—”

When Hannibal doesn't continue, Beverly asks, “Which what?” Then, more gently, her hand on his arm, “Are you okay?”

“Will taught me how to make it.” His eyes are filming over; what has Will adjusted in Hannibal's mechanics?

“Maybe you should make it for him,” she suggests.

“He no longer has functionality for input and output of organic materials.”

Beverly hums thoughtfully. “Sounds like a flaw to me. Doesn't it to you?”

“Yes,” says Hannibal. His gears whir, windows popping up behind his eyes, text and schematics brilliant against the white backdrop of his ocular fluid. “Yes, I suppose it does.”

Chapter End Notes

[post on tumblr]

See you back here tomorrow!

Hannibal's Log II

Chapter Summary

Written for #SummertimeSlick day seventeen: ~~Fluff and/or~~ Angst.

Chapter Notes

Thank you all so much for your continued support! I love reading your comments. :D

This chapter was heavily influenced by hanni-bunny-lecter's latest fantastic and remarkably nsfw xeno!Will art. A preview of things to come? Perhaps...

Trigger warning for discussion of the pseudosexual and non-consensual violation that accompanies being a xenomorph host. Also I basically word-vomited a bunch of technoscience in this chapter, most of it based on the *Alien* series canon and fan supposition. God but I love writing science fiction. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

++Begin recording.++

17th July 2123

As noted in my submitted records to the Company database, I have been pouring over the documented xenobiological traits of XX121 trying to piece together what dynamics, if any, exist with the species genotype. This is especially difficult to determine given that XX121 have no visible or otherwise distinguishable genitalia. Even during the initial dissection of Specimen Prime, there was nothing that could be labeled as a unique set of reproductive organs. I find this odd, given that XX121 do, in fact, reproduce. Still, no matter how much I analyze and reanalyze my past reports and sketches and notes, I can find nothing that would even create the endoparasite which are forcibly injected into a human host.

Into Will, who is thus far the only reported incubatee. Victim, I suppose, given the lack of consent. Yet another facet of the incident I failed to consider.

I have failed him so utterly in my quest to reanimate and improve him. I knew he didn't want to die in xenobirth, which would have been probable, given the location of the endoparasitic

spawn. It never occurred to me that Will might, given the circumstances, simply prefer to die. Such a desire is incomprehensible to me.

After speaking with Beverly and listening to the conversation of Price and Zeller, it is little wonder that Will hates me. I have taken his humanity and replaced it with something he considers monstrous. In awakening his beast, his primal nature, I have robbed him of his agency. I am no better than the xenomorph who attacked him.

Why has Will not taken the opportunity to visit such horrors on me during my repair?

++Insert page break.++

I have made a list of modifications that must be made to Will in order to amend my errors—to atone for my sins, so to speak. Will would, undoubtedly, reject my attempt to help him, so I will have to make the decision for him on his behalf yet again. It is likely that this will only increase his hatred of me, but I see no other choice. If it is humanity he wishes, then I must do my best to give it. Verger-Pazzi will, quite likely, disapprove of my actions, once they are discovered. The surgeries, therefore, must be postponed until we have reentered the Full Depth. I can use the time to frame my gift to Will as a purely scientific process.

Will's foreclaws appear to be useful enough for repair work, so I can only conclude that the muscles merely needed exercise. There must be a rudimentary hand language to teach him that will assist him in communication, though this will be unnecessary once I have removed his pharyngeal jaw.

Once this first surgery has been completed, I will proceed to the second operation, which will be an investigative procedure to locate the existence, if any, of slick glands. I have a suspicion that, should there be a system of dynamic gender within the xenomorph species—

++Create Sidebar. Recordant Location: DIR\LECTER:verpazlog.cdl++

HYPOTHETICAL: Given that XX121's blood is hydrofluoric in nature, it follows that it may act as a sort of lubricant for the statial organs within its carapace. Theoretically, this hydrofluoric acid may likewise act as a parthenogenetic agent, producing an embryo without need of fertilization. Should this theory prove, XX121 could be designated as a sexually agenesitic hermaphrodite..

SUBHYPOTHETICAL: Auxiliary organs, while unnecessary for a full xenomorph, could be developed to confirm the dynamic gender of a human hybrid. B1327-1, a human male omega, would require intersex genital reconstruction. Additionally, this would allow for a study as to whether the hydrofluoric blood doubles as a naturally-produced omegan sexual lubricant.

++End Sidebar.++

A third operation, and arguably the most vital, will be to give Will functional genitalia. Given the human compunction to conceal their sex organs, I may use Price's accidental suggestion. I want Will to be comfortable; there's no need to sacrifice any more of his modesty, should that still matter to him. It seems pointless to enhance his chest at this time.

Between the relocation of the pharyngeus, the implantation of artificial vocal cords, and the genital reconstruction, I hope to give Will a greater understanding of his hybridization. I believe that some of his difficulty accepting his second chance at life stems from seeing himself as, primarily, the enemy. This is hardly the case. Will has always been a unique specimen; now, everyone recognizes him as such.

I'm at a loss as to how to proceed in providing him the means with which to eat and digest food, for I am certain, after my conversation with Beverly, that this, too, would be appreciated. The longing for taste is one I can appreciate. Further study is required, though it will have to wait for now.

It grieves me that Will cannot see his beauty, his radiance. If Will should reject me entirely after this, but still learn to see himself as I do, then that will be enough.

++End recording.++

Chapter End Notes

[post on tumblr]

We return to *Quick Slick Fic* tomorrow for Trope Tuesday II: Psychic Bond Boogaloo!

An Interesting Combination of Elements III

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the year-long delay. You know how it goes. Sometimes shit just has to percolate. This is the Year of Finishing Things, so I hope to be updating a little more frequently.
>
> Also! I finally added the Autistic Will Graham tag! It hasn't been implicitly said, but there's been enough clues for even the FBI to pick up on it.
>
> Trigger warning for brief ableism, discussion of eugenics, and allusion to past genocide.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Learning Universal Sign Language proves harder than Hannibal had expected. Naively, abelisticly, he'd thought a language of gestures would be simple to pick up. Instead, Hannibal found himself lost in nuance and complex grammatical rules, with multiple facial expressions and emphases for single words dependent on cultural meaning and its galaxy of origin.

Hannibal had no choice but to foist his usual research onto Jimmy, who passed it along to Brian, who took it upon himself to develop an array of mirrors in order to glare at both of them at once while he worked. An inelegant solution, Hannibal thinks, and he's uncertain as to which choice he refers.

Uncertainty plagues Hannibal frequently; this, too, is inelegant.

Much to Hannibal's surprise—and he came to the conclusion that he experienced shock almost as often as bewilderment—Jack became indispensable to his linguistic understanding.

"Bella had a sister who was Deaf," he explained over Hannibal's second attempt at saltibarsciai. "The whole family was reassigned to a different colony so Philippa could be taught USL and participate in a Deaf community."

"I imagine it was difficult for the Company to find such a place," said Hannibal, "given the regrettable aftermath of the Eugenics War." He paused, bottle of white synthehol in mid air. "A wonder someone like Will still exists."

Jack hummed around his spoon, then swallowed thickly. "Humanity's never been a tolerant species. Always meddling in lives it shouldn't."

"A lucky race, however, to find other civilizations willing to help the disabled rebuild and elevate themselves once more."

“But unlucky enough to encounter parasites valued more than their human hosts.” He’d eyed Hannibal with purpose, stared him down in judgment, then added, “And I would argue that Will hardly exists, at all.”

Uncertainty, then, and discomfort. Hannibal added it to his personal record alongside the other emotions he was beginning to pin down, awaiting dissection and definition. For now, however, letting Jack teach him USL overruled all other tasks. There could be no progression in studying Will until he could adequately communicate.

So Hannibal ignores his duties with the Captain’s permission—not that he required it; Hannibal awaited Jack’s allowance purely as a gesture of goodwill—and holes up in his private labs, multiple holovids playing behind the smooth surface of his eyes, hands and fingers flying as he practices every known sign language to perfection, then reintegrates them into the universal form.

“I have a proposition,” Hannibal says, incapable of turning away from watching Will’s adept fingers and clumsy thumbs reattaching and tinkering with Hannibal’s repaired legs. He doesn’t wait for Will to shift his attention; Hannibal knows Will despises visual acknowledgment, even as a hybrid. Perhaps *especially* as a hybrid.

Hannibal allows his throat to malfunction. “I would teach you sign language, should you allow it.”

Will pauses for two cycles of Hannibal’s fluids, then resumes his work.

“A method of strengthening your hands, at the very least,” continues Hannibal, “whether you ultimately use it conversationally or not.”

Clawed fingers tremble within the mechanics of Hannibal’s thigh.

“A precursor to surgery—”

Hannibal’s lungs deflate as his back makes contact with the floor, pieces of his leg flying across the lab as Will knocks him from the stool. He holds him down, sharp talons digging into Hannibal’s scalp, providing Hannibal with an extreme close-up of his palm. Its lack of lines and calluses and whorls fascinates him. Hannibal considers engraving new ones when he improves Will’s hands.

“I only meant a small operation to adjust the operative range and mobility of your pollex. You would remain awake; there would be no need for anything beyond a local anesthetic.” Hannibal flexes his hands against the floor. “I could have Jimmy prepare and administer it, since you seem to distrust me.”

Will emits a sharp series of clicking breaths. *Laughter,* Hannibal decides, though it differs slightly from the previous voice sampling in the depths of the *Baltimore.*

Hannibal taps his own thumbs against the tiles. Restlessness. Another unanticipated marvel to analyze.

“You seemed more willing to interact with me,” says Hannibal. “You have shown an interest in my care and maintenance. I only wished to do the same, and I...”

His cerebral network shorts for .00073 seconds, long enough to provoke an involuntary silence. It’s the only fail safe keeping Hannibal from lying, because Will’s education serves Hannibal’s interests, too. He must regain Will’s friendship in order to sacrifice it once more with the future invasive medical procedure he plans. If Will has any chance of regaining some element of humanity, then Hannibal must betray him, and he can hardly betray a stranger.

“I miss our conversations,” Hannibal finishes truthfully, albeit not what he wished to divulge.

Will’s second eyelids part, and his hand withdraws from Hannibal’s face. Hannibal can glimpse the faint shade of algae teal behind the film of Will’s third eyelids, a damnable membrane. *(Distaste,* he adds to his log.) He sits back on his haunches, and here is Will in all his glory, nearer than Hannibal has been to him since Will’s rebirth.

His skin is the same shade of charcoal as Hannibal's prized sketching stylus, and Hannibal wonders how he never noticed. Acid drips from Will's pharyngeal jaw, viscous as the synthetic honey from Jimmy’s nanibees. Hannibal hear it sizzle though his favorite paper-brown handkerchief and tunnel onward: his navy suit; his white shirt; his faux skin. The row of deadly teeth—and had Hannibal meant to sharpen them to rival those of the dread synancera shark?—disappear as Will closes one mouth, and then the other. He stares at Hannibal, face inscrutable, tail curled and looming overhead.

“You must know I have your best interests at heart,” Hannibal assures him. Hannibal pulls his arms free from between his sides and Will's unnaturally strong thighs. He taps the center of his chest with his palm, then drags the fingertips of the same hand from the bottom of his chin up to his bottom lip, all one fluid motion.

“Please,” he says, and the spoken word feels as foreign to him as the sign. “Let me help you, Will, as you have helped me.”

Long moments pass, and Hannibal's perfect timer falters, neglecting to count the time. Will looks down at him, and Hannibal needs no clock to know Will has never held his eyes unflinchingly, not since—

The left side of his chest depresses with the force of Will's palm against Hannibal’s superficial fascia. Will tilts his head, searching Hannibal's face; he must find what he seeks, because Will closes his eyes, then mimics the same movement of Hannibal's fingers, dragging his claws to Hannibal's bottom lip. A single talon traces it, and Hannibal wonders if this is what it means to hold his breath, or to release one unaware, or to forget to take oxygen entirely.

Anticipation, an electric impulse tells him. *You are anticipating,* but Hannibal doesn't know what he anticipates until Will nods, and then the future becomes what baffles him.

Excitement, he thinks, the notes now taken automatically, on impulse. *How curious.*

Chapter End Notes

I forgot how much I loved writing this. Gimme all the monster stories.

It's a Dry Heat I

Chapter Notes

> I've lost complete control of my life, so now this AU has timestamps! Essentially, whenever there's a story I want to go into with more depth than Hannibal's POV can provide, I'll be posting it as a separate fic over here. Timestamps will have an accompanying directional chapter in this fic so you can keep track of what's happening where and to whom and for how many cookies.
>
> For instance, what follows is the prelude to "Brian and Jimmy Make a Sex Tape".

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal slides his eyelids closed. It seems situationally appropriate. He sets down the brittle book of poetry, laying his empty hand flat on the table beside it. As far as his research has shown, Hannibal has now approximated a reaction of baffled annoyance.

“You’ve what?” he asks, silently congratulating himself on an emotion well-performed.

Hannibal scans through his synthetic skin to watch Brian squirm. “We, uh. Jimmy and me, I mean.” Brian clears his throat; his fingers twitch against the sides of his thighs. “We performed a series of heat-specific experiments to demonstrate the necessity of talking to Will about his options regarding surgically reconstructed genitalia.”

“Very thoughtful of you.” Hannibal considers which words will provide further discomfort; whatever side research they’d performed couldn’t excuse the interruption of his studies. “Would you go into detail about your choice of control samples—though I assume you used yourselves, given your beta natures.”

Brian narrows his eyes and looks away, his hands fidgeting like they want to close into fists. Hannibal retracts his eyelids. *Interesting.*

“Jimmy, um, figured we didn’t need a control group per se, given that betas are, in and of themselves, a blank dynamic.”

Them *selves. Not* our *selves. Interesting, indeed.*

Hannibal tilts his head, nods once. “An excellent point, though that makes your research more of a quasi-experiment than one naturally conducted.”

“I guess it was more of a—a—an observational study? Maybe a field experiment?”

“Your procedural classification seems as uncertain as I can only assume your variables to be.” Hannibal straightens the book to ninety-degree angles. “Was there any thought given to

or planning of this experiment?"

"Oh, there was definitely planning," says Jimmy. "It took me a few weeks to get a decent concentration of active to inert ingredients to use for the administered heat simulation serum."

"And your initial testing?"

"There…" Jimmy sidles away from Brian. "There wasn't exactly any initial testing before giving it to the subject in question."

Brian blinks rapidly; his mouth hangs open. "Oh, you have got to be fucking kidding me."

"I knew it was safe!"

"How?"

Jimmy licks his lips and leans back on a lab table. "Because I'd never hurt you, of course."

He keeps frowning, but Brian doesn't seem to be planning a homicide in his laboratory, so Hannibal replaces his surreptitiously acquired scalpel.

"The serum, Dr. Price?"

"Right," he says, crossing his arms across his chest. "It was a compound of various stimulants, aphrodisiacs, and hormones compatible with Brian's current drug regimen. I used Beverly's blood as the carrier—"

"What?"

Hannibal picks up his scalpel again.

"She volunteered!"

The doors to Hannibal's lab slide open—remotely, if the creaking can be trusted. "I did," confirms Beverly. "And your speaker's on, Dr. Lecter."

Brian cranes his head to look through the gap between the doors. "Why would you do that?"

"Uh, because you guys were gonna make a sex tape?"

"He told you?"

"Anyway," continues Jimmy, ignoring Brian as he storms out of the lab, "I span out all of the cells and platelets and, you know, biological garbage."

Hannibal finds himself unwilling to release the scalpel. "You were working against the theory of cross-dynamic compatibility in blood infusions?"

He shrugs. "Seemed the best option."

“Regardless of the lack of proof and the rejection of such treatments by the greater medical community? The illegality of testing, let alone creating?”

“I would have rather done a spinal tap, but that seemed like a lot to ask, considering she was already a co-conspirator.” Jimmy turns and grabs a lab notebook and a small protoplastic box. Hannibal experiences a surge of fondness for Jimmy and their shared enthusiasm for old technology. “Didn’t exactly have an umbilical cord lying around, either. Certainly couldn’t request one. Pazzi would *shit* himself.”

“I await a fresh shipment of dished fetal cells when we make port at Expanse Station Fury.”

“I’d never presume, but…?”

Hannibal hums his approval. “I agree with your decision to use a biological carrier, and find your determination to push the bounds of both accepted science and current law admirable. The cells—and much of my stores—shall be at your disposal.”

Jimmy exhales sharply, then glances down at the notebook in his hands before turning his gaze to Hannibal. There’s a touch of relief on his face Hannibal didn’t expect. “I’m very grateful, Dr. Lecter.”

“Your research?”

“Right! Now, you’ll find the chemical blueprints and analyses for the HSS in the first half. Those aren’t the original notes, but you’re welcome to those, too, if you’d like. The second half are pages of scribbles and configurations for retrofitting a dynamic sybaritic device to allow it to serve as a fully functioning synthetic knot.”

Hannibal flips through the notebook, scanning and recording each page, organizing them as properly as Jimmy couldn’t. “As to the experiment?”

“That’s recorded on the teletape,” which Jimmy lays on top of the page Hannibal reads. “You may find it somewhat unorthodox.”

“Because it’s a sex tape!” Beverly calls out. “And your speaker’s still on, Doc!”

Chapter End Notes

I'd say poor Brian, but...

End Notes

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